

# The Berwyn Ice Plant

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At the beginning of the twentieth century, perishable food and milk were stored in spring houses, a necessity for farmers and a luxury for a few of the 1200 inhabitants of Berwyn. Blocks of ice could be cut from ponds in the winter, stored for summer use, but were expensive. Residents had ice boxes to store their ice but if it was purchased and transported from any distance, it could melt quickly.

With the advent of power generation and refrigeration in the late 1800s, natural ice from ponds that were more and more apt to be contaminated with sewage was being replaced by manufactured ice. Early in the year 1900 circulars appeared in Berwyn announcing a proposed electrical generating plant and ice manufacturing facility. The site was property owned by John R. Keller. The closest electrical generating plant at this time was in Wayne and the nearest source for ice was Philadelphia. Frederick Mathews purchased the ground on which the plant was later erected from Keller on February 27, 1901. The property had several buildings but most important was the spring house supplying a capacity of fifty gallons per minute. On April 15, 1901 an agreement was made between Frederick's brother Edward J. Matthews and Charles Z. Jones for the construction of an ice plant from plans provided by the Vilter Manufacturing Co., of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which included their 20 ton ice making machine. The plant was to consist of a main building, boiler, and engine room. All this was to cost \$6500. Edward Matthews became a Director and President of the Berwyn Ice Company and Charles Jones was a Director and General Manager. The company was incorporated under the laws of the State of Pennsylvania on August 15, 1901.

The new company erected a one story building about twenty by twenty-four feet which fronted on Lancaster Avenue and was designated as #577. The building had sheds adjoining it on the back where storage was needed for the horses, wagons, and associated equipment for producing and delivering the ice. An engineer was hired to run the plant and drivers to deliver the ice. The open sheds were enclosed at a later date and the enclosed space then had the appearance of a single long building.

Charles Jones was in the process of building and setting up the business when Edward Matthews died on January 3, 1902. On May 2, 1902 Mr. Jones contracted with Atlantic Telegraph and Telephone Co. for "underground conduit, cable, pole, junction box and wires on the premises." A large steam engine pumped ammonia around coils of the 'keeping area.' Large, heavy steel open-ended cans were filled with water and dropped into the brine. Ice was cooled by an engine in the east end of the building and the blocks were stored in the west end. A conveyor belt loaded ice onto freight cars in the back.

A Mr. Turner succeeded Mr. Jones about 1904. Two years later in 1906, because of difficulties in cash flow, a mortgage was placed on the property. Over the years, with difficulty in meeting those mortgage

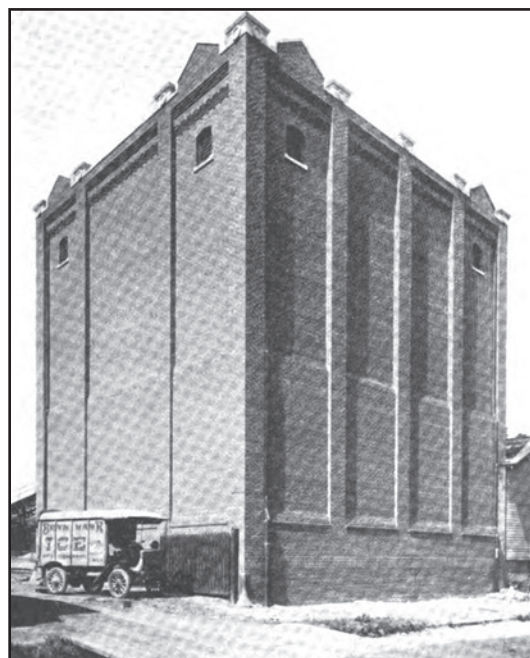


Fig. 1 – Front of 2000-ton ice storage house at Berwyn, PA  
[note original ice company building visible on lower right]

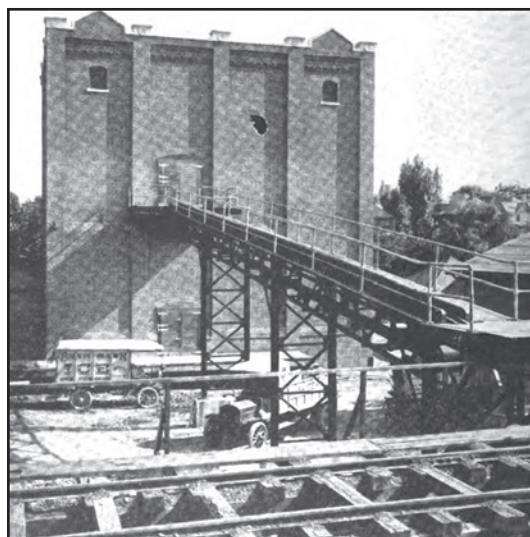
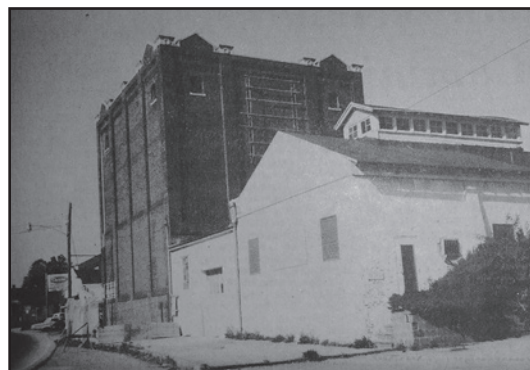


Fig. 2 – Rear of Berwyn ice storage with connection to railroad track. [Both figures above from *Ice and Refrigeration Illustrated*, v.51, p.78 (September, 1916)]



1971 photo of original 1902 building and large ice house added in 1916. Courtesy Suburban & Wayne Times/Radnor Historical Society

payments, a default was declared and the property was foreclosed on by the Union Trust Co. The receivers granted the property to Francis Rawle, Attorney on April 20, 1913 who promptly sold it to the Bryn Mawr Ice Co. on May 20, 1913. On taking over the business, Bryn Mawr Ice Co. erected a huge red brick building next door to the plant to store the ice. Lined with cork for insulation, the building had a storage capacity of two thousand tons. Besides its size, the building was noted for the sign on its facade which read "Ice Never Fails." In the next ten years, the horse drawn wagons that had been used to deliver ice were replaced by ice trucks. Ice continued to be sold from this location into the 1940s but was out of business by 1950 when refrigerators became a staple in every home. The property was sold to Ernest J. Conte on January 12, 1951, perhaps to be used for his moving and storage company, as this was the recorded use of the building at the time. Then on January 4, 1956, it was sold to Alvin and Edith Enders from which Mr. Enders ran his business, the Ender Sign Co. When Mr. Enders passed away, his wife sold the property on June 17, 1971 to William R. Stafford, the proprietor of Ye Olde Beef and Ale House. The huge brick former ice storage building, with its three foot thick walls was tumbling down, and in short order Mr. Stafford had the building removed. The original Berwyn Ice Plant building was left standing and at the time was reported to have a sign for the Electrode Products Company. There were numerous tenants but the building continued to deteriorate and was reported to have had a tree growing out of the roof.

In 1983, the manager of Easttown Township, Gene R. Williams, concerned about the decay of the building, approached Ernest Eadeh, a nearby property owner, to consider purchasing the site. That year Mr. Eadeh and his wife Leslie purchased the property. The building was restored and made useable for tenants. It consisted of the original brick building with an adjacent brick building with a stone façade. Some recent tenants were Kit Wilkes, an orthodontist, and Yang's Market. In 2004, a brick addition was added to the back of the original building with the stone façade and a parking garage. The garage stretches around the entire back with entrances on the east and west sides. The garage is for the use of all the tenants and patrons of the building and the adjacent shopping center. Meredith's and now Aneu Restaurant have occupied the section with the stone façade. The front part of the restaurant originally housed the offices of the plant manager and the back is part of the new addition. To the east, the back part was once where the loading platforms were for the ice is now occupied by Fresh Ideas. Beginning February 25, 2013, Meridith Coyle started serving Aneu Restaurant's breakfast and lunch crowds and operating her catering business out of Fresh Ideas. The former location of Aneu became Binni & Flynn's, a popular cantina formerly owned and operated by her parents under that name (notably in the Gateway Shopping Center) starting in the 1970s.

Ernest Eadeh died in 2010 and the Berwyn Ice Plant property is now in a trust and managed by Eadeh Enterprises.



On left, new parking garage structure in the location of the demolished large ice house. On right, the original ice company building, currently housing Binni & Flynn's restaurant and Fresh Ideas. 2014 photo courtesy John O. Senior

#### Sources:

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Conversations with Stacey Ballard of Eadeh Enterprises, Gene Williams, former Easttown Township Manager, and Herb Fry, Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society